CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An application programming interface (API) for communication between an administration server and an authentication server connected via a data communication network, said administration server providing a service associated with a namespace to one or more users on the data communication network, said authentication server having a database associated therewith storing authentication information for authenticating the users of the namespace service, said administration server being responsive to an administrator for issuing at least one request to said authentication server, said request specifying at least one action to be performed in relation to the namespace, said API comprising instructions for:

receiving, by the authentication server, the request from the administration server;

verifying, by the authentication server, authority of the administration server to issue the request received by the authentication server; and

performing, by the authentication server, the action specified by the received, verified request.

2. The API of claim 1, wherein the database associated with the authentication server stores authorization information relating to the administration server and wherein verifying the authority of the administration server to issue the request comprises identifying the administration server and locating corresponding authorization

information for the administration server in the database associated with the authentication server.

3. The API of claim 2, wherein identifying the administration server comprises examining an encrypted ticket accompanying the request, said ticket identifying the administrator.

4. The API of claim 2, wherein identifying the administration server comprises examining an encrypted ticket accompanying the request, said ticket identifying the administrator.

5. The API of claim 1, wherein performing the specified action comprises reserving the namespace to prevent an unauthorized user from obtaining an account in the namespace.

6. The API of claim 5, wherein reserving the namespace comprises creating an administrator account associated with the administration server to manage the namespace.

7. The API of claim 1, wherein performing the specified action comprises releasing the namespace to allow any user to obtain an account in the namespace.

8. The API of claim 1, wherein performing the specified action comprises maintaining and editing a namespace administrator list.

9. The API of claim 8, wherein editing a namespace administrator list comprises adding at least one administrator to the namespace administrator list.

10. The API of claim 8, wherein editing a namespace administrator list comprises deleting at least one administrator from the namespace administrator list.

11. The API of claim 1, wherein performing the specified action comprises editing one or more user accounts in the namespace.

12. The API of claim 11, wherein editing one or more user accounts in the namespace comprises creating at least one user account in the namespace.

13. The API of claim 11, wherein editing one or more user accounts in the namespace comprises resetting a namespace password associated with at least one of the user accounts.

14. The API of claim 11, wherein editing one or more user accounts in the namespace comprises removing at least one of the user accounts from the namespace.

15. The API of claim 11, wherein editing one or more user accounts in the namespace comprises editing a profile associated with at least one of the user accounts.

16. The API of claim 11, wherein editing one or more user accounts in the namespace comprises changing a sign-in name associated with at least one of the user accounts.

17. The API of claim 1, wherein performing the specified action comprises:

listing user accounts associated with the namespace; and

evicting one or more of the user accounts from the namespace.

18. The API of claim 17, wherein performing the specified action further comprises permitting the respective user to contest an evicted account.

19. The API of claim 1, wherein performing the specified action comprises auditing actions within user accounts associated with the namespace.

20. The API of claim 1, further comprising returning a success response from the authentication server to the administration server if the request was received, the administration server was verified, and the specified action was performed successfully.

21. The API of claim 1, wherein performing the specified action comprises returning an error response from the authentication server to the administration server if

the request was received, the administration server was not verified, or the specified action was performed unsuccessfully.

22. The API of claim 1, wherein the API is based on a simple object access protocol (SOAP).

23. The API of claim 1, wherein the instructions are computer-executable instructions stored on one or more computer readable media.

24. A method for delegating at least one administrative task from a first system to a second system, said first and second systems connected via a data communication network, said second system providing a service associated with a namespace to one or more users on the data communication network, said method comprising:

maintaining a database of one or more namespaces including the namespace associated with the second system, said database being maintained by the first system;

receiving a call from the second system by the first system, said call providing a request that at least one routine be performed to implement a desired administrative task for managing the database; and

executing the routine, by the first system, in response to the call received from the second system to implement the administrative task.

25. The method of claim 24 wherein the routine comprises an application programming interface (API) for performing the administrative task.

26. The method of claim 25 wherein the API is implemented according to a simple object access protocol (SOAP).

27. The method of claim 24 further comprising generating an error response if an error occurs during execution of the routine.

28. The method of claim 24 wherein the first system is a multi-site user authentication system and the second system is an affiliate selected from the group consisting of an application service provider (ASP), an Internet service provider (ISP), a namespace owner (NSO), and a namespace provisioning (NSP) partner.

29. The method of claim 24 wherein the administrative task comprises reserving at least one of the namespaces to prevent an unauthorized user from obtaining an account in the reserved namespace.

30. The method of claim 29 wherein the second system is associated with an ASP and wherein reserving at least one of the namespaces comprises reserving, by the ASP, at least one of the namespaces on behalf of a customer of the ASP.

31. The method of claim 24 wherein the administrative task comprises releasing at least one of the namespaces to allow any user to obtain an account in the released namespace.

32. The method of claim 24 wherein the database maintained by the first system stores a list of namespace administrators corresponding to at least one of the namespaces and wherein the administrative task comprises editing the namespace administrator list.

33. The method of claim 24 wherein the administrative task comprises editing at least one user account in at least one of the namespaces.

34. The method of claim 33 wherein the administrative task comprises changing a sign-in name associated with one or more of the user accounts.

35. One or more computer readable media having computer-executable instructions for performing the method recited in claim 24.

36. A computer-readable medium having computer-executable components for delegating at least one administrative task from an authentication system to at least one administration system, said authentication system and said administration system connected via a data communication network, said administration system providing a service associated with a namespace to one or more users on the data communication network, said components comprising:

88

an identifier component for maintaining a database of one or more namespaces, said database being maintained by the authentication system;

an interface component for receiving a call from the administration system by the authentication system, said call providing a request that at least one routine be performed to implement a desired administrative task for managing the database; and

an operation component for executing the routine, by the authentication system, in response to the call received from the administration system to implement the administrative task.

37. The computer-readable medium of claim 36, wherein the interface component comprises an application programming interface for implementing the routine.

38. The computer-readable medium of claim 36, wherein the routine comprises computer-executable instructions for:

reserving at least one of the namespaces to prevent an unauthorized user from obtaining an account in the reserved namespace;

editing one or more user accounts in the namespace;

maintaining and editing a namespace administrator list; and

releasing the reserved namespace to allow an unauthorized user to obtain an account in the namespace.

39. A system for authenticating at least one user of a namespace service, said system comprising:

one or more user databases storing authentication information;

an authentication server for communicating with the database via a data communication network; and

an administration server for communicating with the authentication server via the data communication network, said administration server providing the namespace service, said administration server being responsive to an administrator for issuing at least one request to said authentication server, said request specifying at least one action to be performed in relation to the namespace service.

40. The system of claim 39, further comprising a nexus database storing administration information selected from a group consisting of an affiliate list, namespaces, the location of the user databases, and administration server information.

41. The system of claim 39, wherein the authentication information comprises a login and password associated with each user.

42. The system of claim 39, wherein the administration server and authentication server communicate on the data communication network via a simple object access protocol (SOAP).

43. The system of claim 39, wherein the administration server is associated with an affiliate selected from a group consisting of an application service provider, an Internet service provider, a namespace owner, and a namespace provisioning partner.

44. The system of claim 39, wherein the user obtains a namespace identifier from the authentication system via the administration server.

45. The system of claim 44, wherein the namespace identifier is an electronic mail address associated with a user account with the authentication system.